The Relationship Information Tracking System (RITS): Building Simple Applications to Improve Coffee Traceability, Transparency and Quality

Quarter 1 Activity Report
January-March 2010

Introduction

USAID/COMPETE awarded Sustainable Harvest at Origin/Africa a two-year grant totaling $468,550 to implement the Relationship Information Tracking System (RITS). The objective of the RITS Project is to increase the income of small-holder coffee producers by increasing Kilicafe's efficiency, competitiveness, and transparency.

RITS allows the Kilicafe cooperative management, from washing station managers to the sales and exporting team, to classify coffees by quality. They will negotiate higher prices for the high-quality coffees and reliably track coffee lots from the washing station to port. They will also be able to manage their member information, which will allow targeted follow-up from agronomists, simplify certification audits, and reward growers who produce high-quality coffee.

Objectives

For the months January-March 2010, Sustainable Harvest staff focused on *Implementation of RITS*, as laid out in the grant proposal :

> Task 1: *Implementation of RITS* – During the beginning of the year, Sustainable Harvest will finalize its RITS and iPhone application technology for use at coffee washing stations. The company will then pilot this technology with Kilicafe, monitoring the success and any challenges that might be encountered with cooperative members using cell phone technology, RFID tags, and the new RITS database. In order to implement this technology, Sustainable Harvest will conduct a series of trainings with the cooperative members to insure proper adoption and use.

Our objectives during the first quarter were to:

- Open the project
- Fully understand the Kilicafe context as applicable to RITS
- Begin skills transfer to prepare producers for the harvest

Narrative Summary

Much of Sustainable Harvest's time in the first quarter was spent opening the project in Moshi. This involved relocating staff, equipping an office, and introducing ourselves to local stakeholders. We conducted several meetings with Kilicafe and the Tanzania Coffee Board (TCB); Portland-based David Griswold and Libby Evans traveled to Moshi to formally begin relationships with these stakeholders. As a result, we are confident of the support of TCB and Kilicafe. Kilicafe has agreed that one of their staff members will start as a permanent liaison role with our project staff; our experience in Kigoma has shown that this type of investment from producer organizations is the key to success.

Staff also conducted a survey of Kilicafe's production and marketing practices. We interviewed Kilicafe's cupping and sales team, field visits to washing stations, and meetings with leaders of

Farmer Groups. With the information we gathered, Sustainable Harvest's IT team is currently tailoring RITS to the situation in Moshi. The online tracking system will flow with Kilicafe's existing paper system, ensuring that the project will increase efficiency at the washing station, cupping, and sales levels. Through the survey our staff also selected the four washing stations that will participate in the pilot this harvest. They are: Ngyani, Singi'isi, Messengarony and Amkeni.

In March, Sustainable Harvest staff conducted three trainings at our Moshi office location. The first, which we called the "Introduction to RITS and User Testing" workshop, was attended by officials from Kilicafe and the TCB. The purpose was not only to introduce these professionals to the tracking system, but to test their perception of its efficiency and usefulness. After an explanation of Relationship Coffee and the way that RITS improves efficiency along the supply chain, we took the participants through a series of tasks--for example creating a "cherry reception" record for a farmer. The tasks accomplished two things: they showed users how to manipulate the system, and also provided the Sustainable Harvest IT team with valuable feedback to improve the system for Kilicafe users.

Also in March, we invited sixteen representatives of Farmer Groups to attend a basic skills training in computer use and a basic skills training in iphone use. Participants arrived with a wide range of experience with technology. But one constant that we observed was the comparative ease with which trainees handled the iphones. While many have never used a computer, they all know how mobile phones work. We believe that the iphone will only continue to prove itself as the best medium for traceability in East Africa.

As a result of the two days of training, participants in the pilot phase of the RITS project have the basic understanding of computers that is necessary to use

RITS--they are able to perform general functions on the computer, use the internet browser, type with more confidence (both on the keyboard and iphone screen), go online with the iphone, and take pictures with the iphone. This training created the skills base that we need to continue as the harvest approaches.
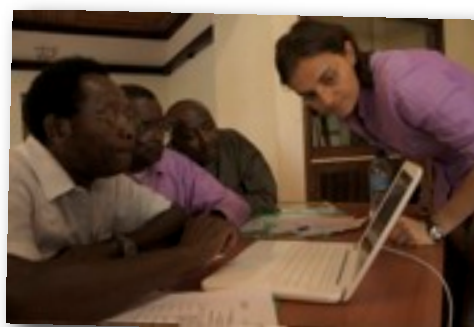

Chart 1: Objective, Activity, and Result

Objective	Activity	Result	% Achieved*
Open the project	Open and equip an office in Moshi	• Fully functioning office open in Moshi	
	Set up financial systems		
	Hire project staff		
	Gather the support of Kilicafe management and Tanzania Coffee Board	• 1 staff person from Kilicafe to work permanently with SH on the project.	
Fully understand the Kilicafe context as applies to RITS	Conduct surveys to establish baselines at the Kilicafe cooperative for understanding current methods of tracking and bulking coffee	• 4 Farmer Groups selected to conduct the RITS pilot • RITS currently being tailored to Kilicafe's specifications	100%
	Develop training materials for trainers, producers, and dry mill personnel on the RITS system	• Training strategy developed, using Kilicafe's user-feedback which will lead to more efficient transfer of knowledge	50%
Begin skills transfer to prepare producers for the harvest	Conduct training on: • RFID /cell phone use workshops • RITS system workshop for dry mill managers and cuppers	• Improved computer skills at Kilicafe • Basic computer skills and iphone skills at Farmer Groups • Familiarity with RITS at Kilicafe and Farmer Groups	12.5%

* This percentage only applies to activities/milestones listed in the grant proposal. We felt that some activities not delineated in that list still mentioned merit here.

Challenges

We have not faced any major challenges implementing project activities; the four producer groups are well-prepared for the coming harvest, Kilicafe management has given us full support, and development of changes to RITS are on track. However we did encounter challenges on the administrative end of the project. In March, we were forced to terminate the contracts of two new staff people due to inappropriate behavior. Our office is still fully functioning, though now staffed by only two people rather than the four originally proposed. We do not want to rush into hiring replacements, but are continuing the recruitment process through our network of trusted partners. We plan to have solved the capacity shortage by the time the harvest begins, in the second quarter of the project.